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The ending to Ecclesiastes notwithstanding, this English translation of a 2008 German publication is a welcome contribution to the genre of Old Testament “introduction” precisely because the authors introduce their up-to-date treatments of ancient history and religion, and Old Testament literature, in lucid expositions of the nature of sources, history and methodological assumptions. In their contributions, the authors present their cases for the status of Old Testament texts as historical sources, not true primary sources; the fundamental identity of “Israel” as largely Canaanite; and their commitment to composition criticism, the term they prefer instead of literary or redaction criticism.

The *Handbook* is composed of seven sections: Sources and Methods, History and Religion, Torah and the Former Prophets, Latter Prophets, Writings, Deuterocanonical literature, and a consideration of a theology of the Old Testament. The first section includes a discussion of synchronic and application-oriented exegetical methods; both too brief to be useful. Students working through this section will appreciate extensive consideration of “The Steps of the Historical Critical Method,” a discussion puzzlingly absent from the German version, given the authors’ dedication to understanding phenomena historically.

The section on history, in addition to the expected treatments, includes a lucid presentation of the complex nature of history, historiography and storytelling, and how the biblical texts fit, or not, these categories. Although they acknowledge that all historiography is hypothetical, the authors insist that “modern history writing is not fiction: historical events and processes can be traced back to given structures or linked to explanations that evidence greater plausibility than alternatives” (72). That is true, except for all the revisionist his-
ories of the modern era that argue “greater plausibility.” The exile is the great crucible for the formation of the Old Testament literature and “Israel.”

The opening treatment of the literature discloses a pedagogy that moves from the macro- to the microstructures. After considering Genesis through Kings, the authors move to the smaller canonical units—books and units such as the Pentateuch and Joshua-Kings—and then to the discernible editorial processes underlying the literature. After describing the legal texts separately, the authors treat the priestly, non-priestly and deuteronomistic contributions, concluding with a discussion of the deuteronomistic composition of Exodus through Kings. This reversal of the traditional fragmentizing that fails to recognize the post-Genesis canonical units of the Pentateuch, respects both the literature as received and the history of scholarship. Similar methodological moves structure the discussion of the Latter Prophets and the Writings.

Chapters on theology and reception follow treatments of the textual units discussed. For the Enneauteuch that means a theology of Genesis—Kings of the legal texts, the Priestly document, Deuteronomy, the non-priestly primeval history, the non-priestly ancestral and Joseph stories, and the deuteronomistic composition of Exodus-Kings. Each is followed with “Notes on the History of Reception.” The addition of theology and reception to an Introduction is to be applauded for it enables the student to recognize that these texts are not mere antiquaria, but that they continue to have a life, even if only through their influence on movies and music. Nevertheless, an opportunity is missed when the notes on reception do not include references to reception in the contemporary church (older commentary literature is mentioned). This is equally the case when the chapters on theology treat non-canonical units, unlike Rendtorff’s theology and Zenger and his co-author’s treatment of canonical units. Thus while these chapters represent laudable additions to the genre of “Introduction,” the Handbook remains firmly rooted in the Enlightenment separation of the academy from the church; it errs on the side of the academy. This is apparent when the authors criticize the consequences of Childs’ canonical approach as “reducing [the text’s] multi-layered historical meaning to a single monodimensional interpretation that takes into account only the narrow perspective and background of the current reader” (40). However, this critique can also be applied to the hyper-pluralist readings subsequent to diachronic and what the authors call “application-oriented” exegesis. Nevertheless, the authors do the academy a service by introducing discussions on theology and the history of reception. Perhaps the present unsettled character of Old Testament studies will also allow the academy to come closer to serving the church, as is evident in the scholarship of Childs and Zenger.